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For Psychological Health & Traumatic Brain Injury

**Today's webinar is:**

# **Military Families and Coping with Reintegration Challenges**

**April 25, 2013, 1-2:30 p.m. (EDT)**

**Presenter: Kelly A. Blasko, Ph.D.**

Lead Psychologist, MilitaryKidsConnect.org  
National Center for Telehealth and Technology

**Moderator: Col. Rick L. Campise, Ph.D., ABPP**

Deputy Director, National Capital Region  
National Center for Telehealth and Technology



# Webinar Details

- Live closed captioning is now available through Federal Relay Conference Captioning (please see the pod beneath the presentation slides).
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  - Dial: **888-455-0936**
  - Use participant pass code: **3938468#**
- Webinar information
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- Question-and-answer session
  - Submit questions via the Adobe Connect or Defense Connect Online question box

# Webinar Details (continued)

- The following continuing education (CE) credit is approved for this activity:
  - 1.5 AMA PRA Category 1 Credits™
  - 1.75 CE Contact Hours Physical Therapy and Occupational Therapy
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  - 1.5 Social Work CE Hours
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# Webinar Overview: Military Families and Coping with Reintegration Challenges

Since the onset of Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom, military children have experienced various stressors, including repeated parental deployment, parental injuries and/or death of a parent.

In response to these stressors, children and teens may experience a range of emotions (e.g., anger, sadness) and behaviors (e.g., acting out, isolating). Health care providers who serve military families have the opportunity to help parents and children struggling with deployment, parental injury and/or grief and loss.

This webinar will:

- Discuss the strengths of military families and the challenges they face
- Discuss how parental deployment, injury or death is a unique stressor to military children
- Describe the role of health care providers in supporting military children who have lost a parent

# Military Families and Coping with Reintegration Challenges

Kelly A. Blasko, Ph.D.

Lead Psychologist, MilitaryKidsConnect.org  
National Center for Telehealth and Technology  
April 25, 2013



# Disclaimer

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The opinions or assertions contained herein are the private views of the presenter and are not to be construed as official or as reflecting the views of the Department of the Army or the Department of Defense.

I do not have a relevant financial relationship to disclose, and I do not intend to discuss an off-label/investigative use of a commercial product.



# Learning Objectives

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- Discuss the strengths of military families and the challenges they face
- Discuss how parental deployment, injury or death is a unique stressor to military children
- Describe the role of health care providers in supporting military children who have lost a parent





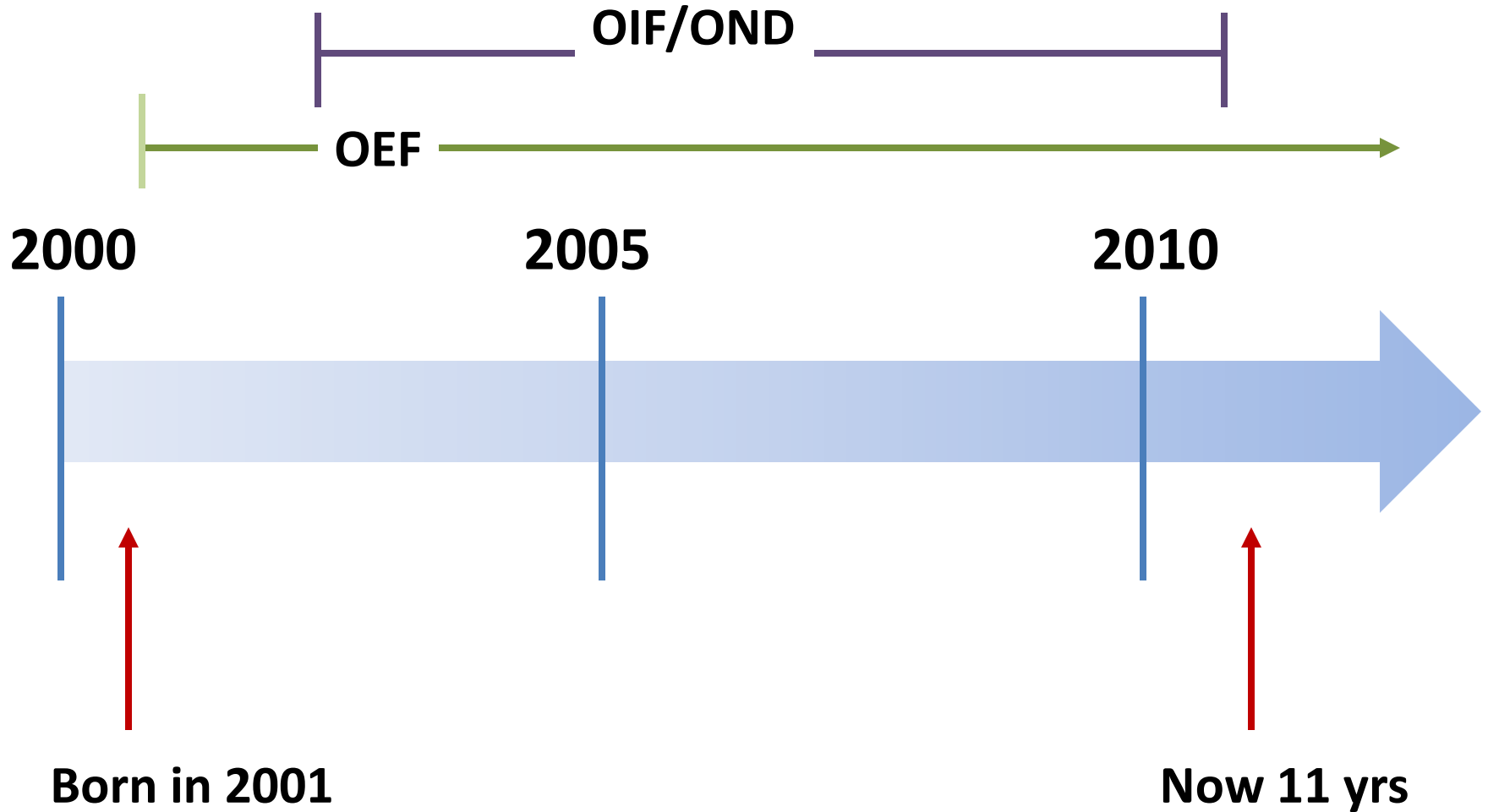
# Content Outline

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- Military Families – Demographics
- Military Family Culture
- Family System and Deployment
- Reintegration and the Family
  - Visible and Invisible Injuries, Death
  - Grief and Loss
- Moving Forward



# Timeline

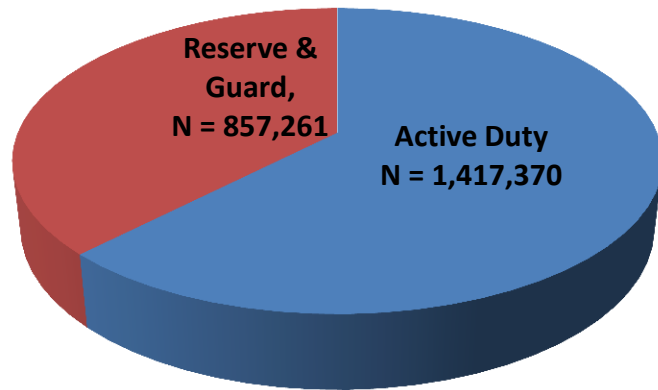


Notes: OIF = Operation Iraqi Freedom; OND = Operation New Dawn; OEF = Operation Enduring Freedom



# Active Duty, Reserve and National Guard

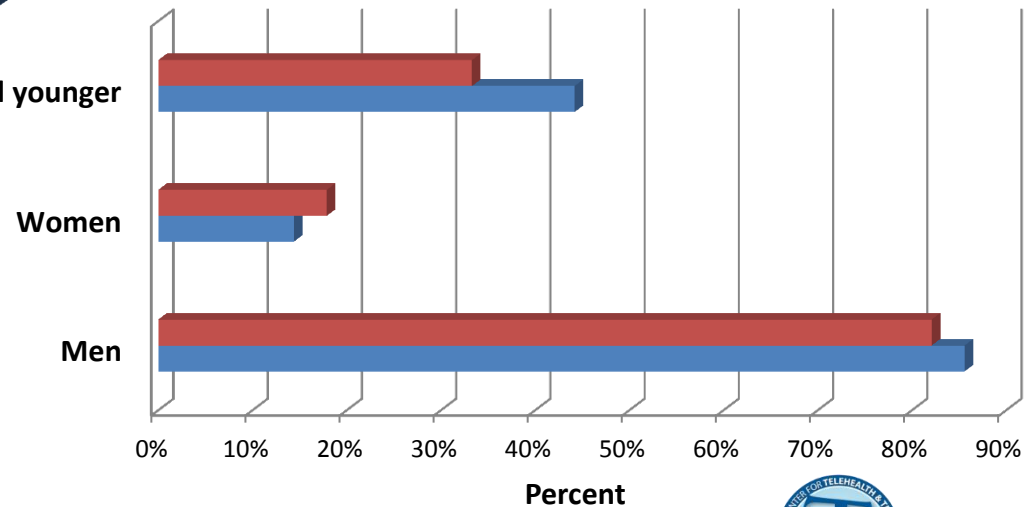
## Total Number of Active Duty, Reserve & National Guard



25 yrs and younger

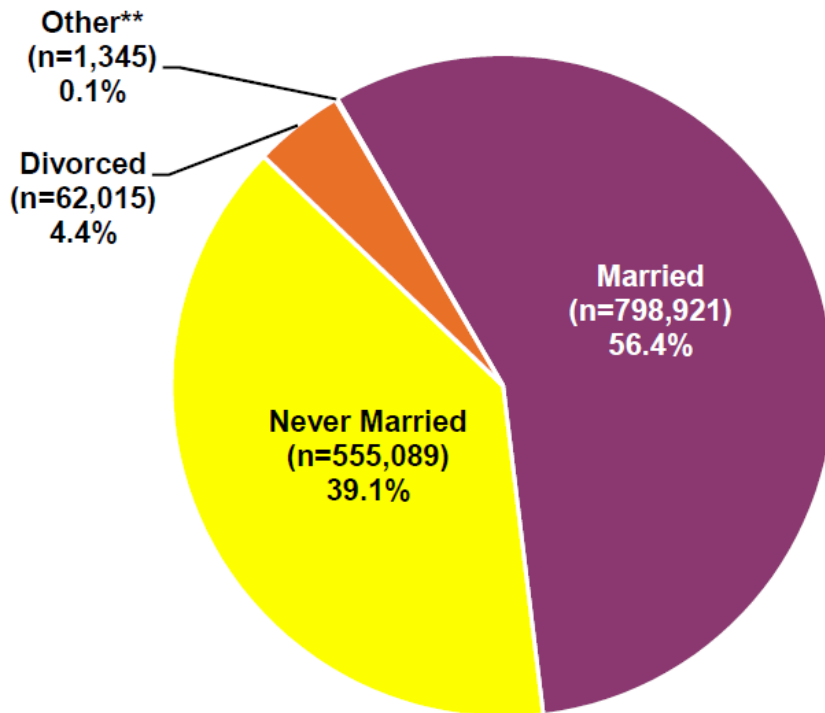
## % Gender & Age Demographics

■ Reserve & Guard ■ Active Duty



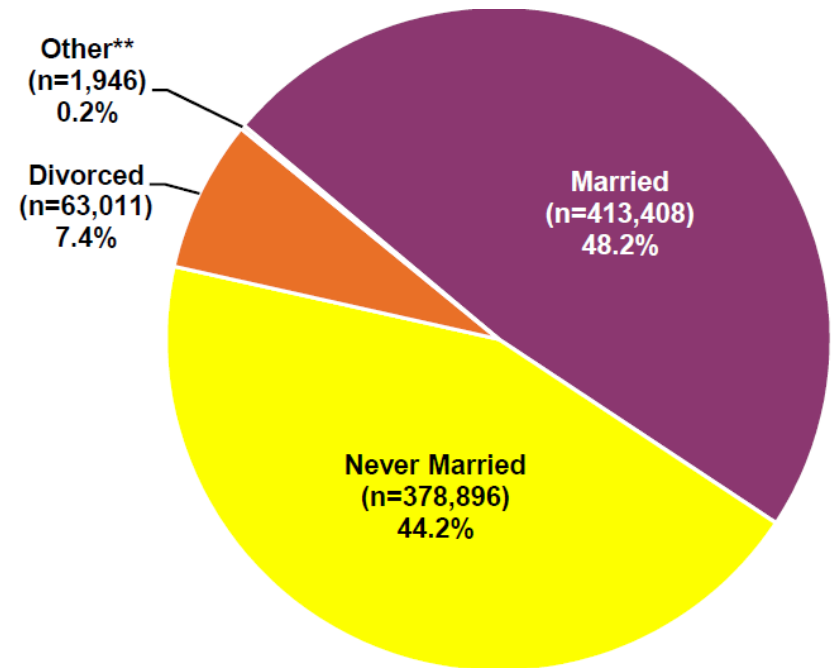
# Marital Status Demographics

## Active Duty N= 1,417,370



**Number of Active Duty Members in Dual-Military Marriages = 94,327**

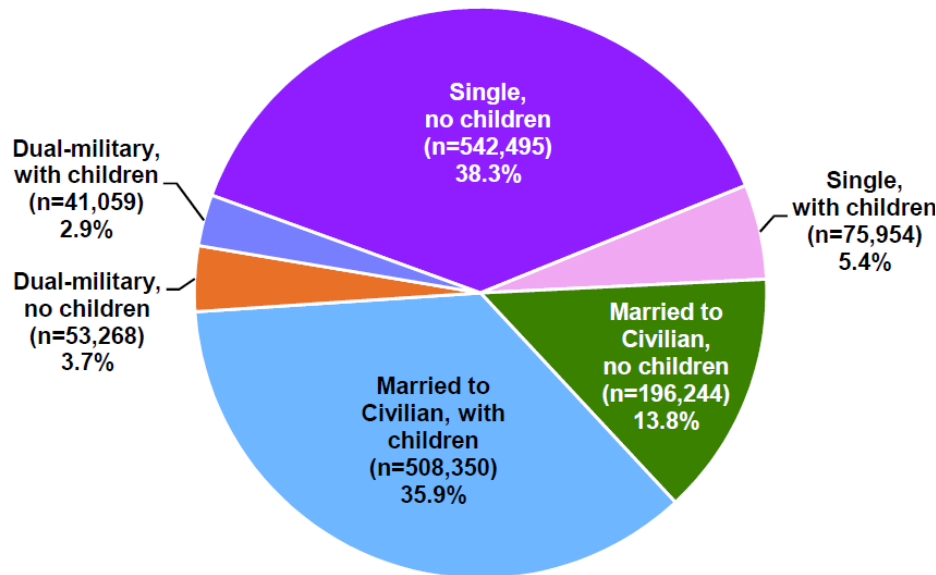
## Selected Reserve N= 857,261



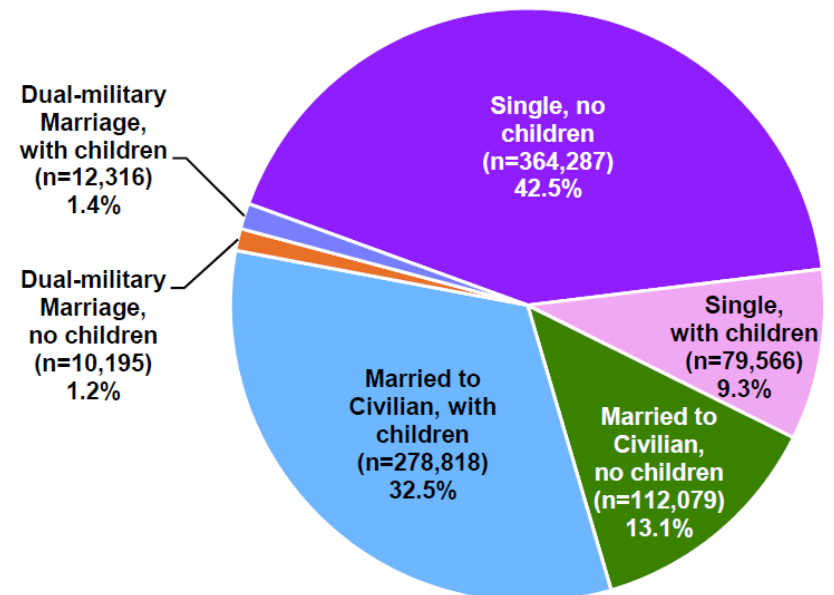
**Number of Select Reserve Members in Dual-Military Marriages = 22,511**

# Family Status Demographics

**Active Duty**  
**N= 1,417,370**

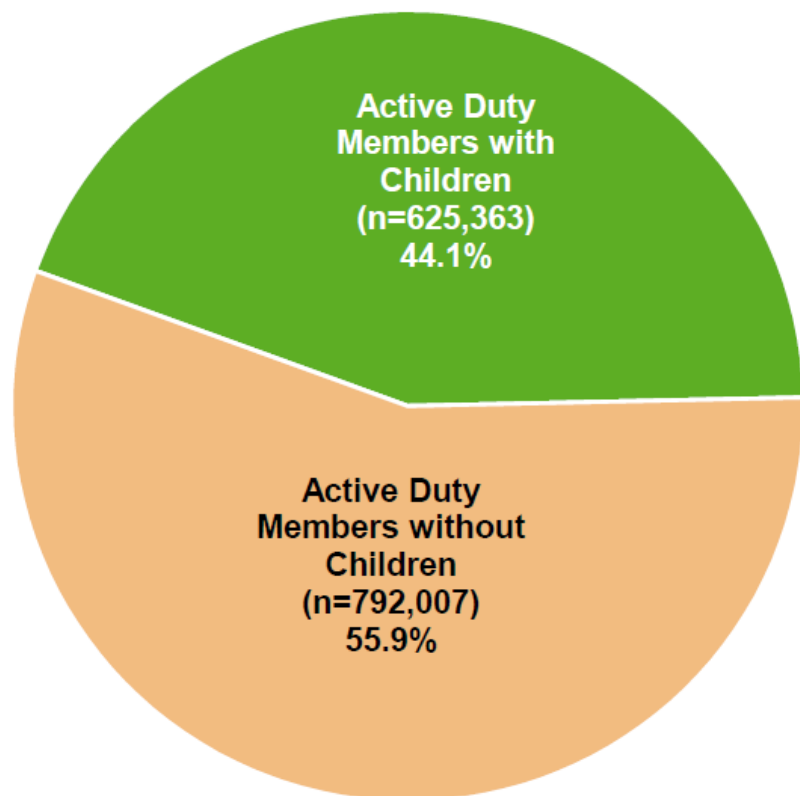


**Selected Reserve**  
**N= 857,261**

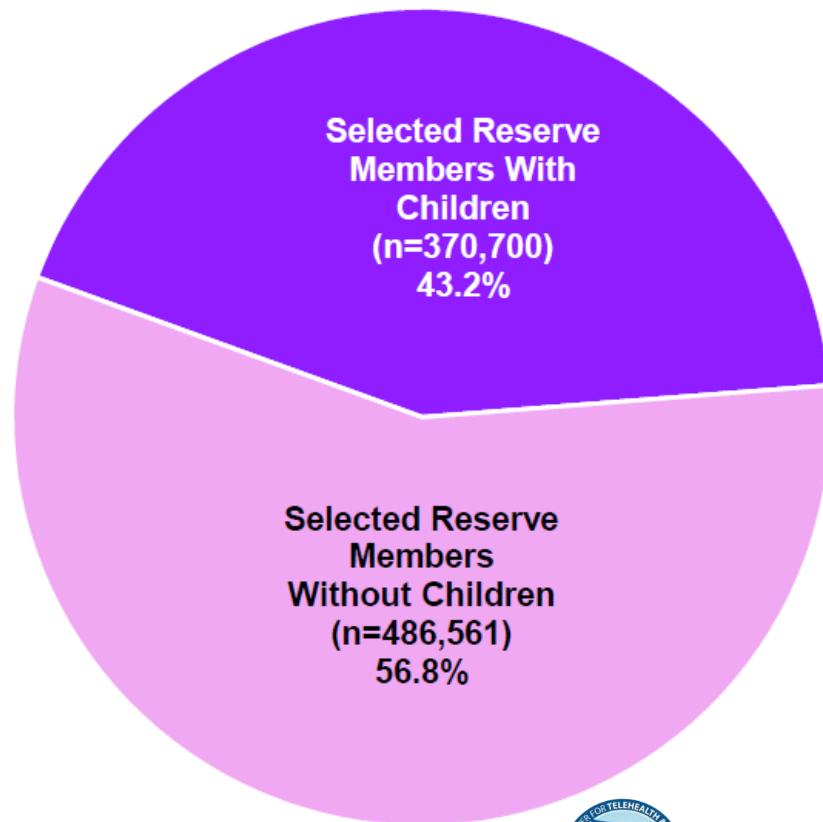


# Military Children Demographics

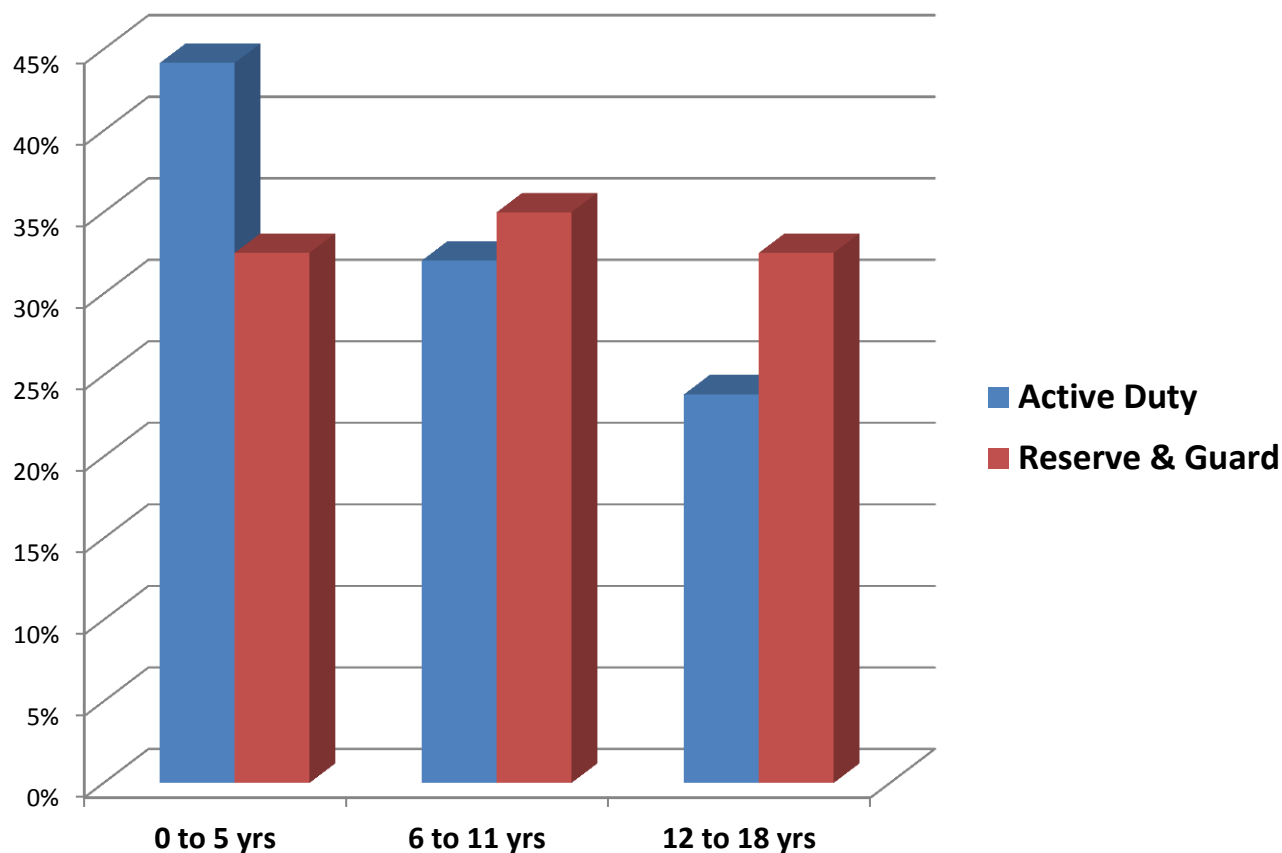
## Active Duty N= 1,417,370



## Selected Reserve N= 857,261



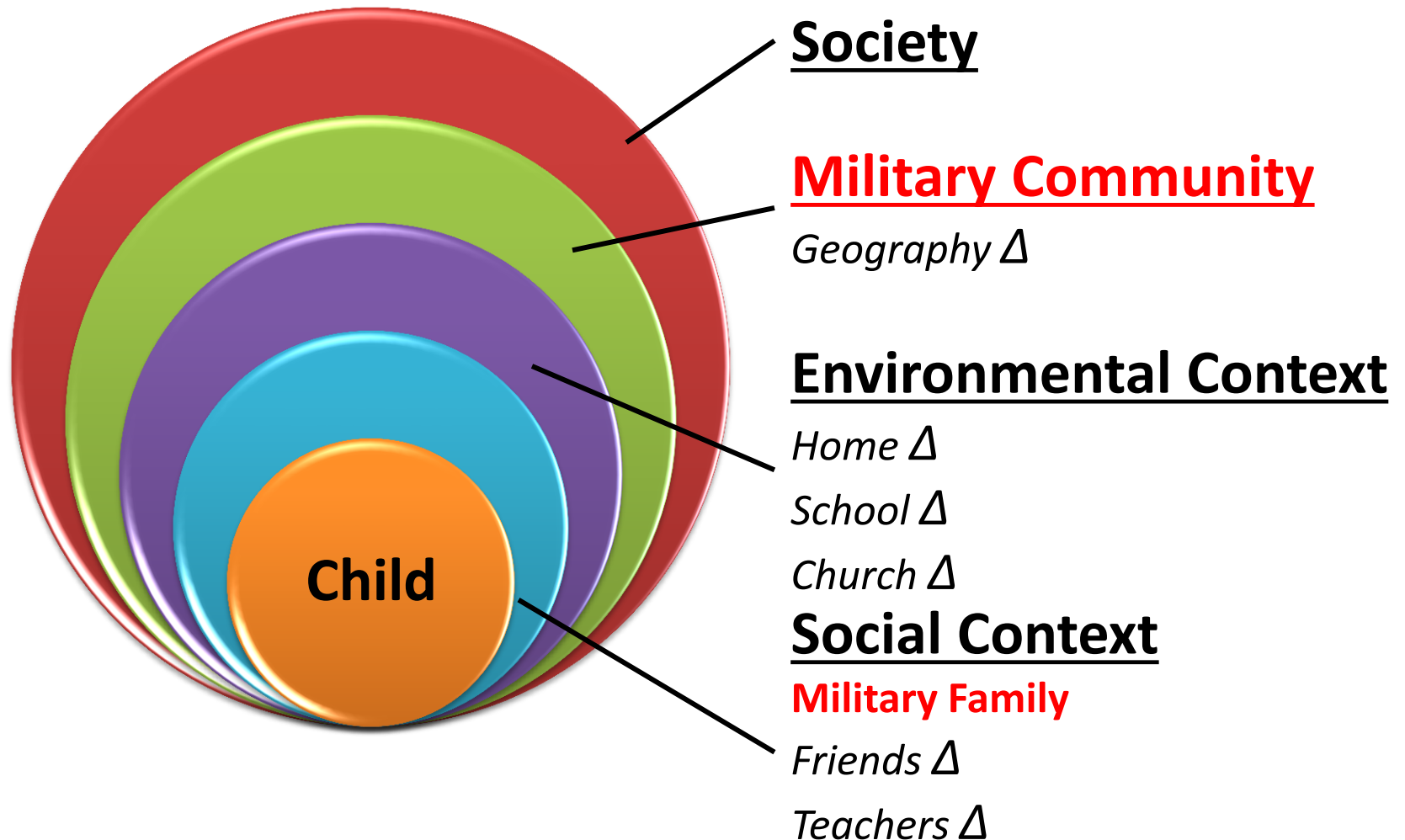
# Military Children Age Demographics



Source: DoD Demographics 2010: Profile of the Military Community



# Military Child Influencers





# Military Culture Values

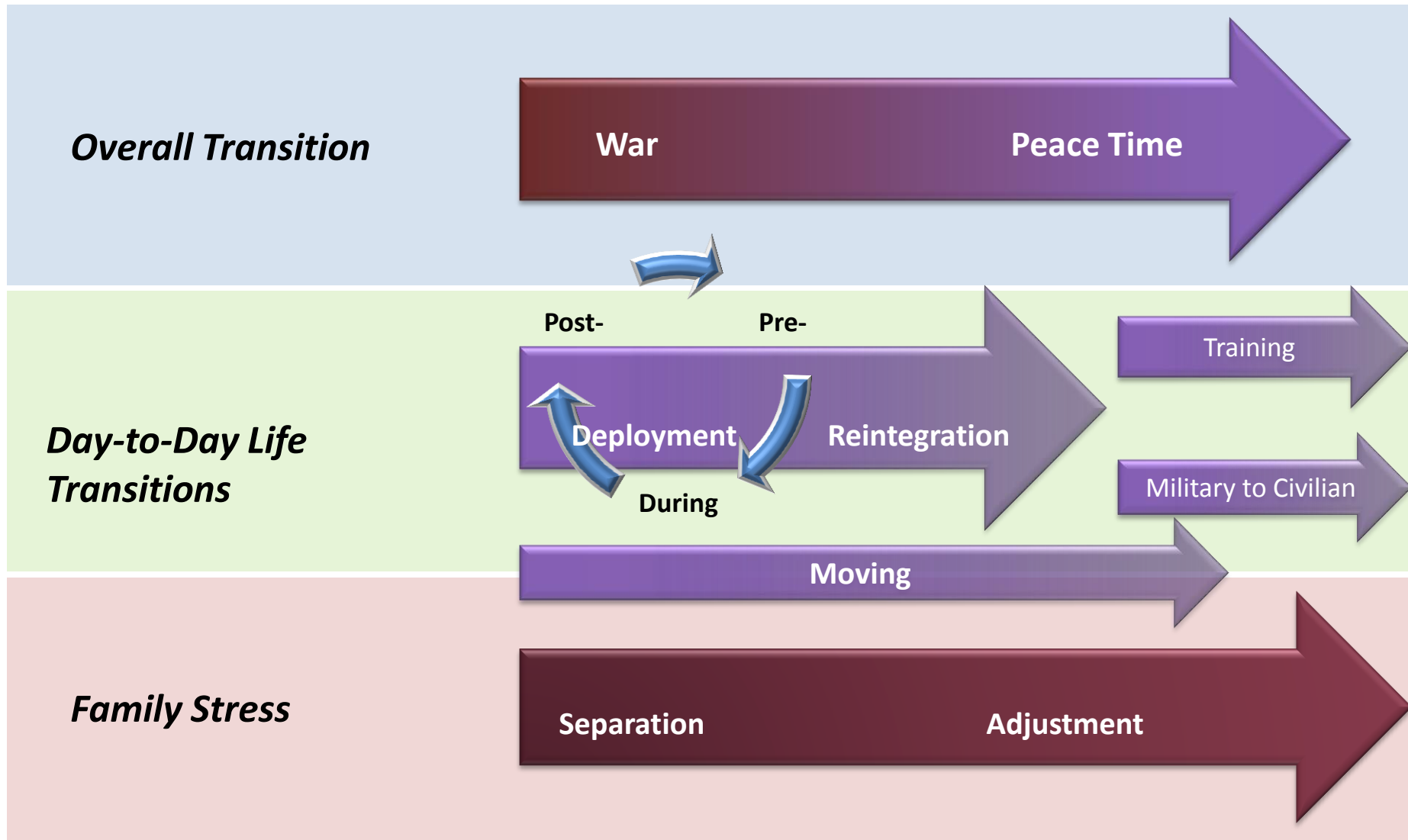
Most Important:  
Trust

- Service
- Duty
- Honor
- Loyalty
- Respect
- Integrity
- Personal Courage

- Compared with civilian children, military children have:
  - Greater respect for authority
  - More tolerant, resourceful, adaptable, responsible
  - Welcoming of challenges
  - Greater likelihood of befriending someone who is “different”



# Time of Transitions

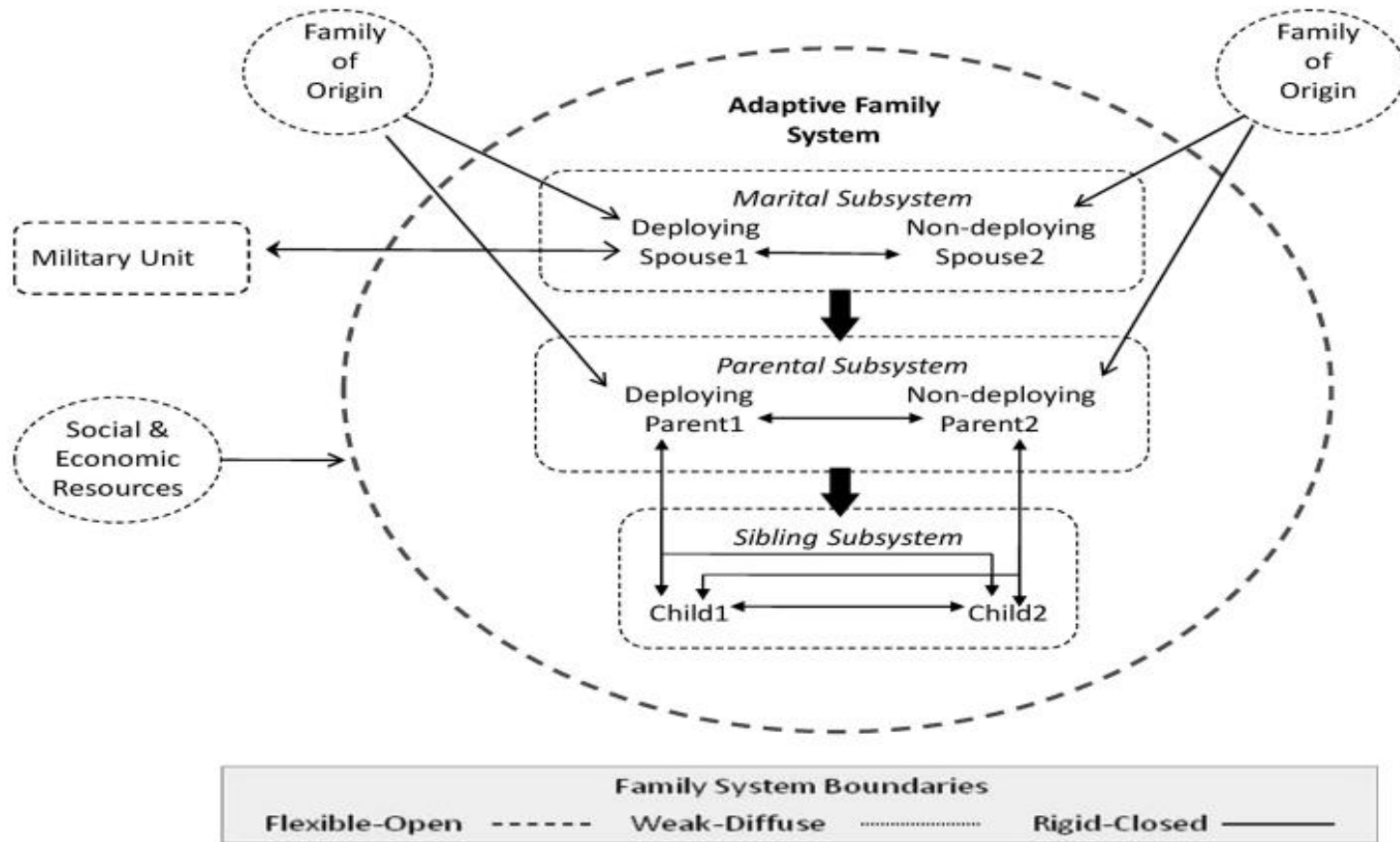


# Readiness

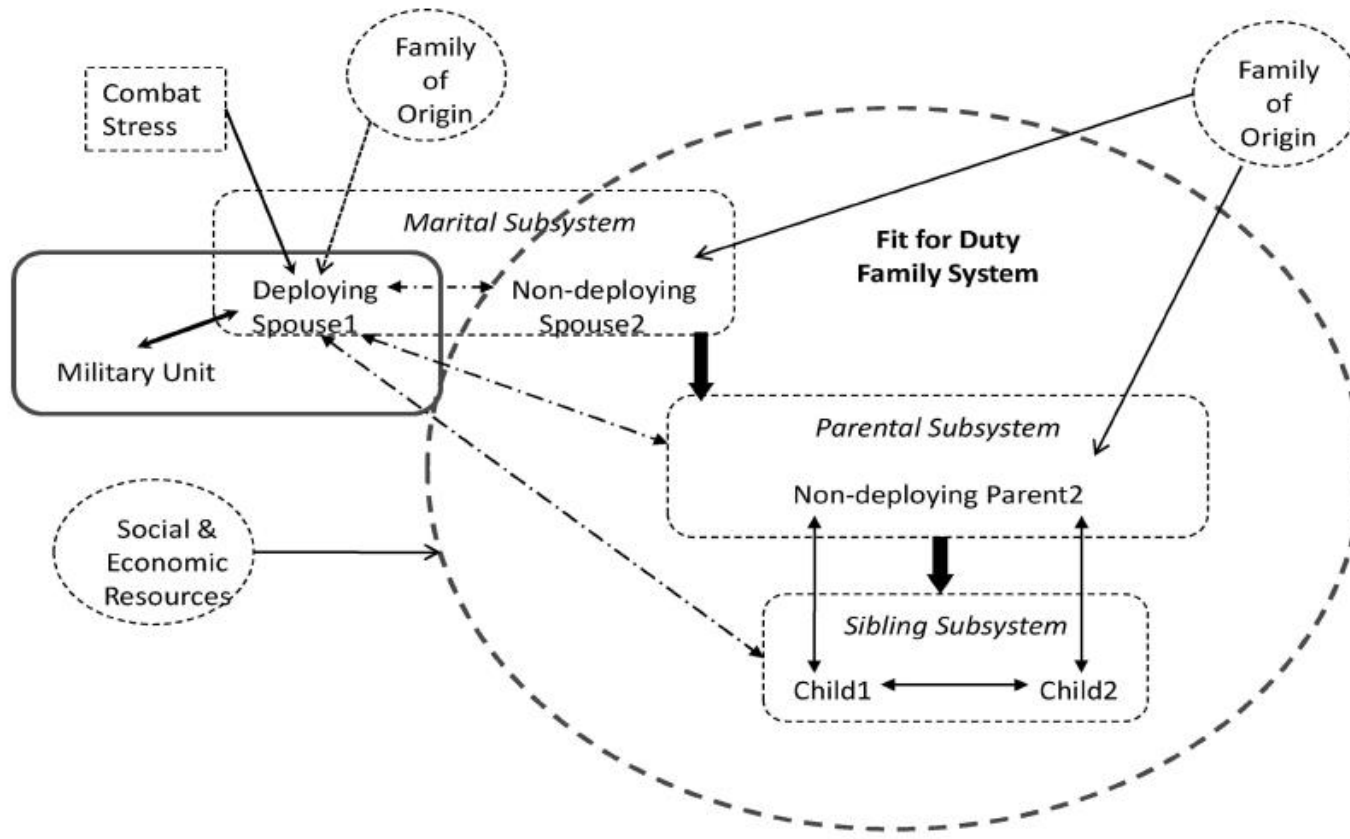
- “Families who are prepared and equipped with the skills and tools to successfully meet the challenges of the military lifestyle.”
- “Getting things in order” ...finances, living arrangements, property, estate, life insurance, will...
- Emotionally prepared: deployed parent, at-home parent, children



# Military Families: Family Systems



# Military Family System: Deployment



# Military Genograms

- Captures military cultural aspects of a family
- Assists in understanding military generational influences
- Provides relational aspect of military service: separations, adjustments
- Is diagnostic in nature through understanding relationships
- Assists in assessment of protective and risk factors



# Military-specific Elements

- Family history of military service
  - Rank, length of service, deployments, honors, discharge status
- Attitudes toward military, military service, war
- Served during war or not
- Behavioral/physical health before, during and after service
- Wartime trauma?
- Witness?
  - Casualties, injuries, prisoner of war, AWOL
- Loss of combat buddies?
- Willingness of self-disclosure
- Role in family during deployment cycle
- Political affiliations
- Living arrangements – on or off base



# Potential Risk Factors

- Pre-existing behavioral health issues
- Non-deployed parent stress levels
- Nature of deployment
  - Multiple/prolonged deployments, single parent or dual-parent deployments, complicated deployments
- Lack of social connectedness or resources
  - National Guard, Reserves, lower rank, language barriers, off-base housing, few friends/family available
- Parenting risk factors
  - Parental anger, psychiatric disorder, disconnection, marital conflict





# Bottom Line: Deployment & Behavioral Health

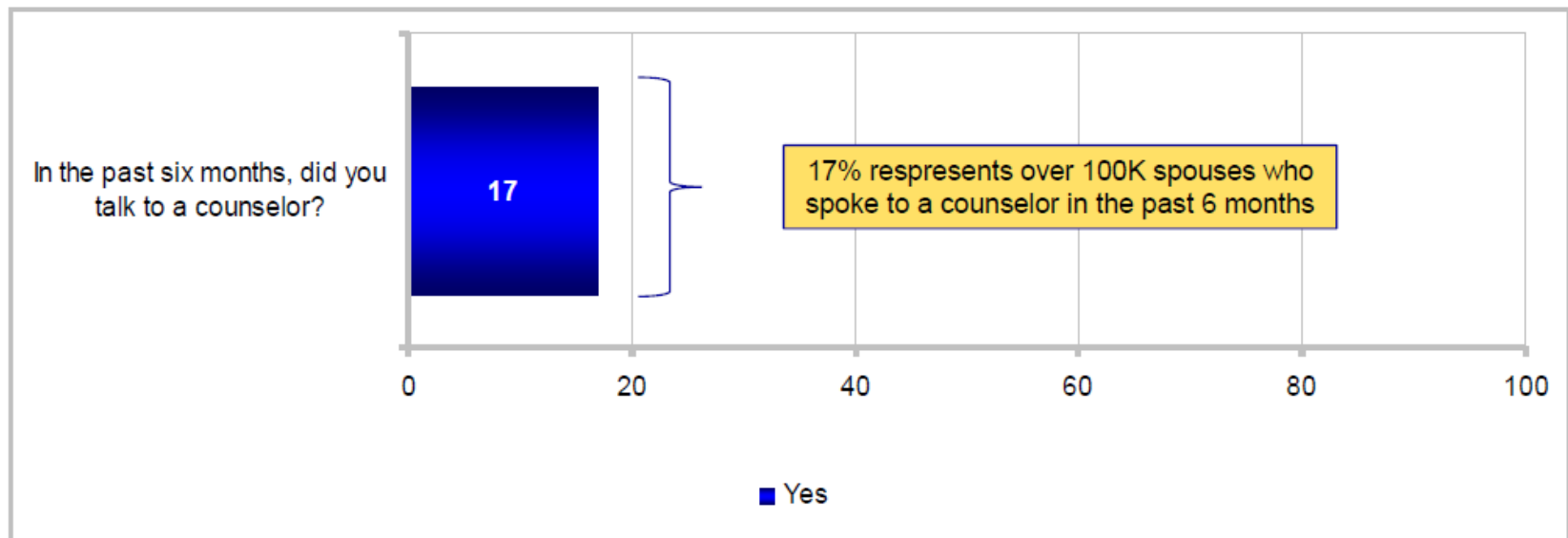
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- High levels of stress for military kids and their families
- Two most significant contributing factors:
  - Health of non-deployed parent
  - Cumulative deployments
- No.1 Fear
  - Will my parent/spouse be safe and return unharmed?



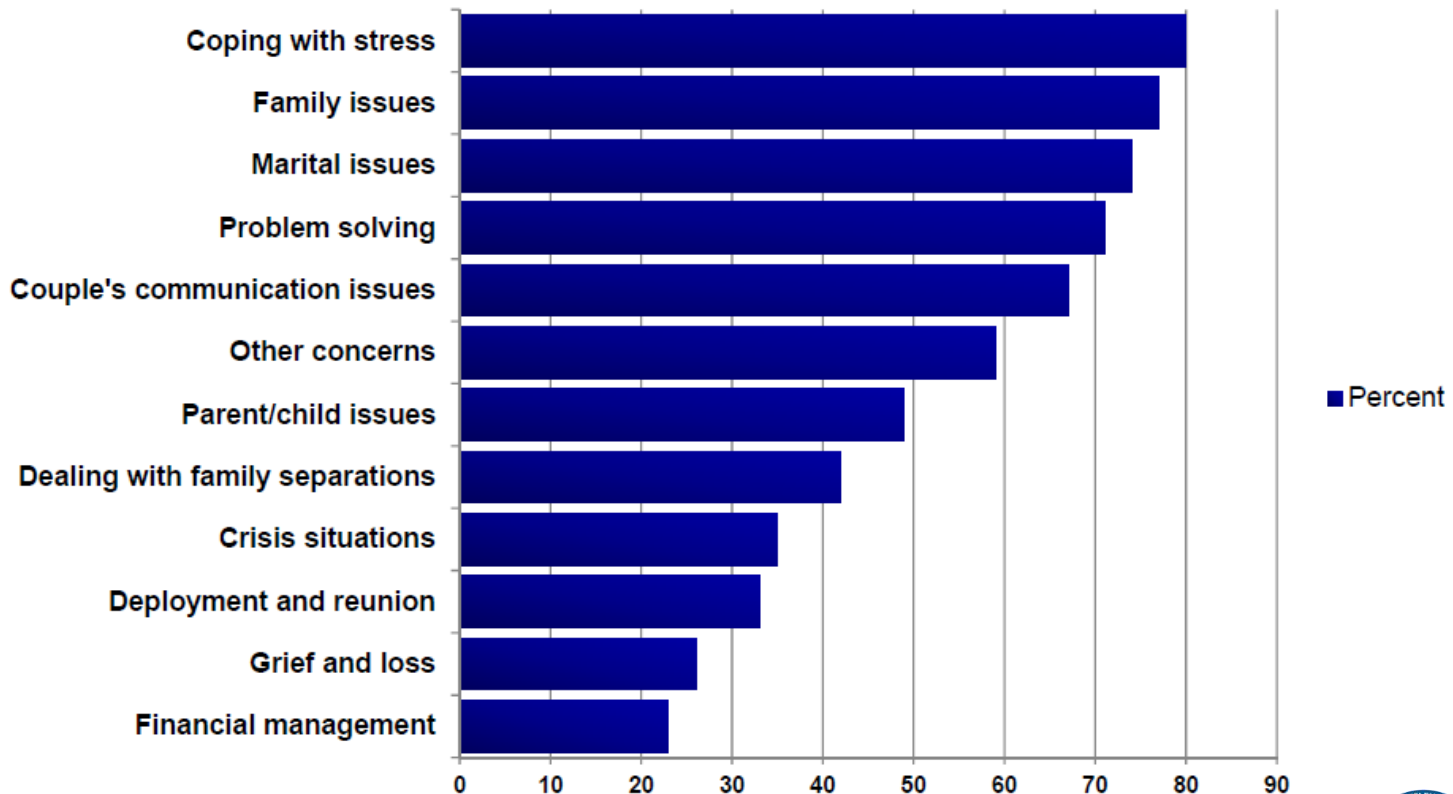
# Help-Seeking: Active Duty Spouses

## Use of Mental Health Counseling N= 1,417,370



# Help-Seeking: Active Duty Spouses (continued)

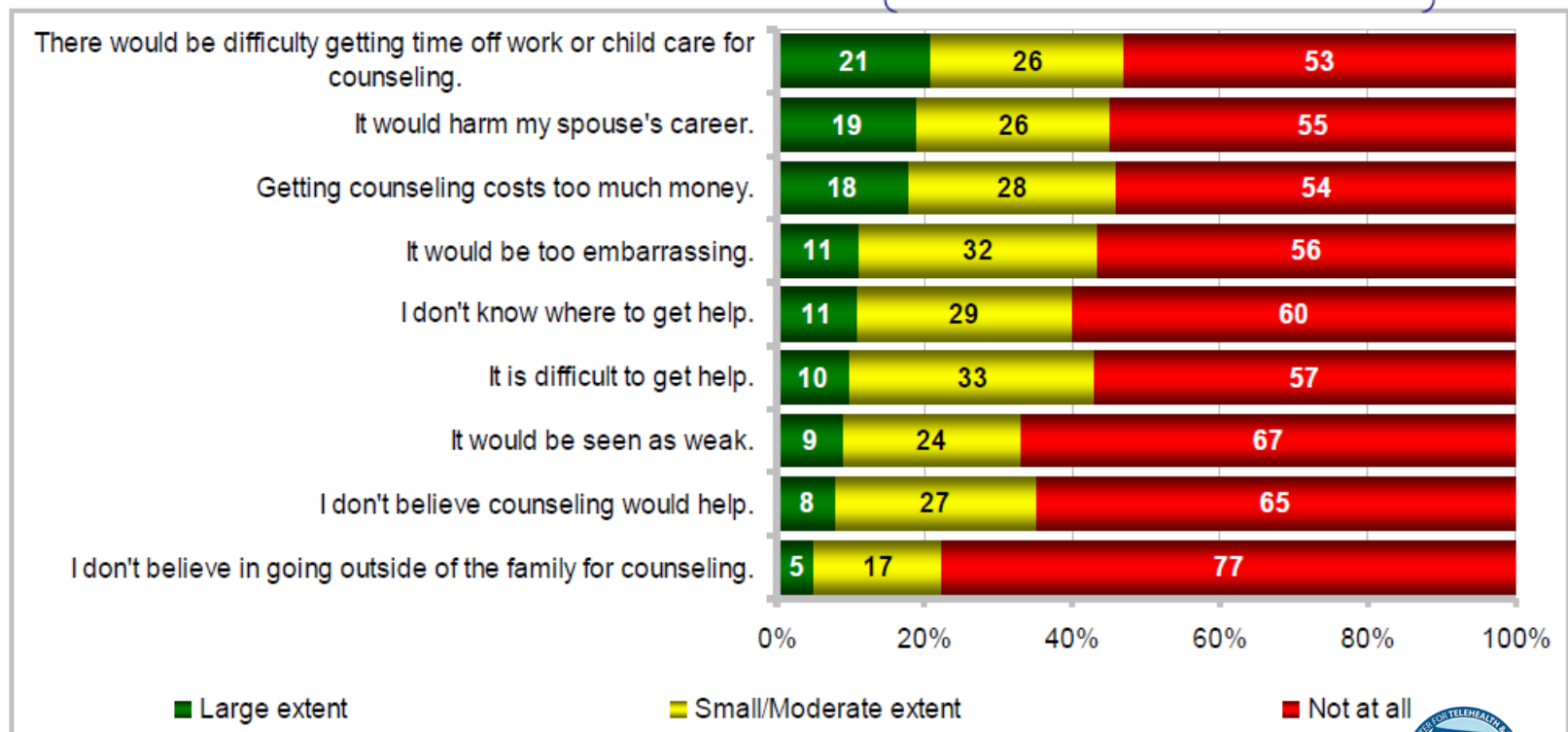
**Issues Discussed in Counseling**  
Percent of Active Duty Spouses Who Received Counseling



# Help-Seeking: Active Duty Spouses (continued)

## Concerns That Impact Decision About Counseling Percent of All Active Duty Spouses

78% of spouses reported they had some concern that might impact their decision regarding counseling

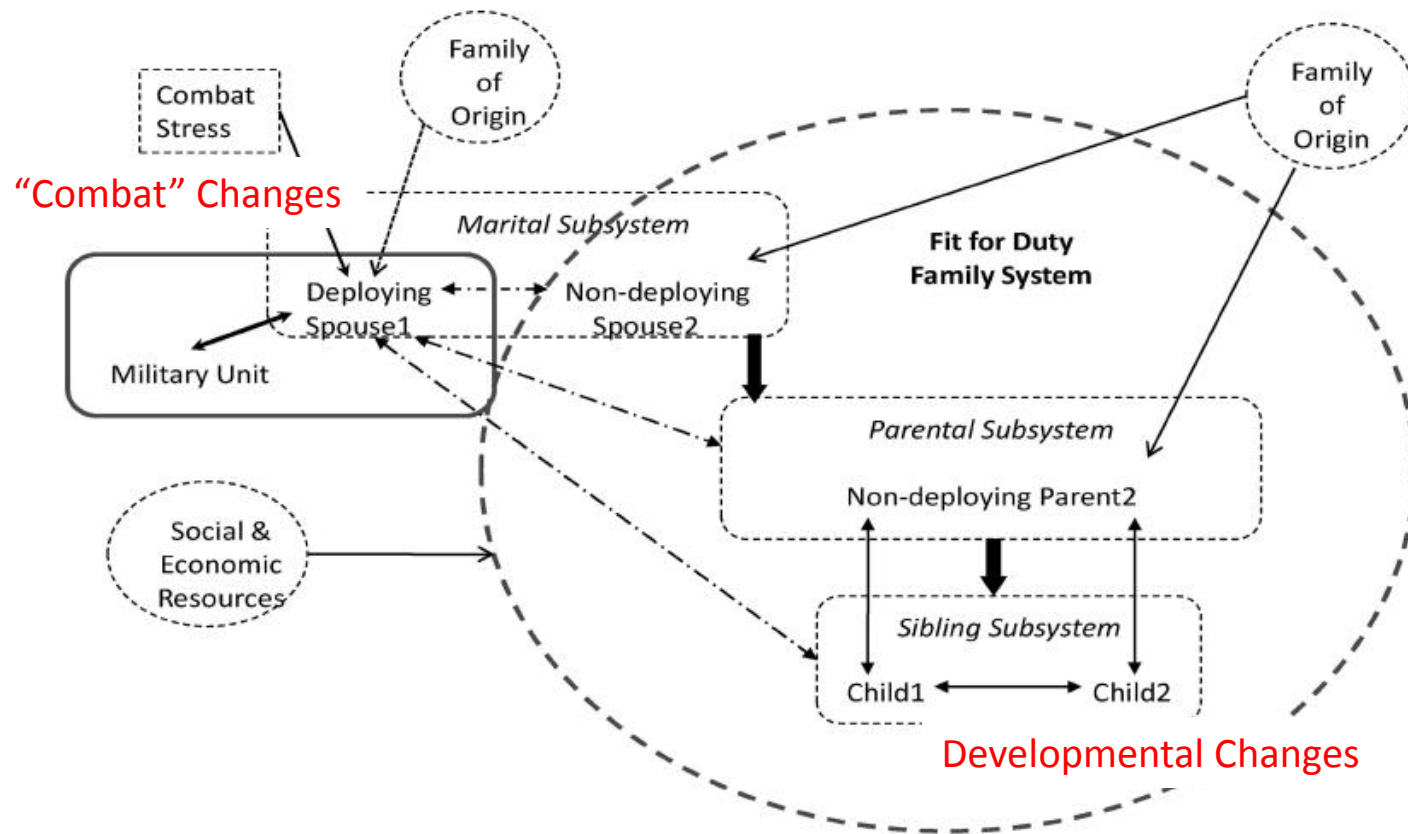


# Strength-Based Approach

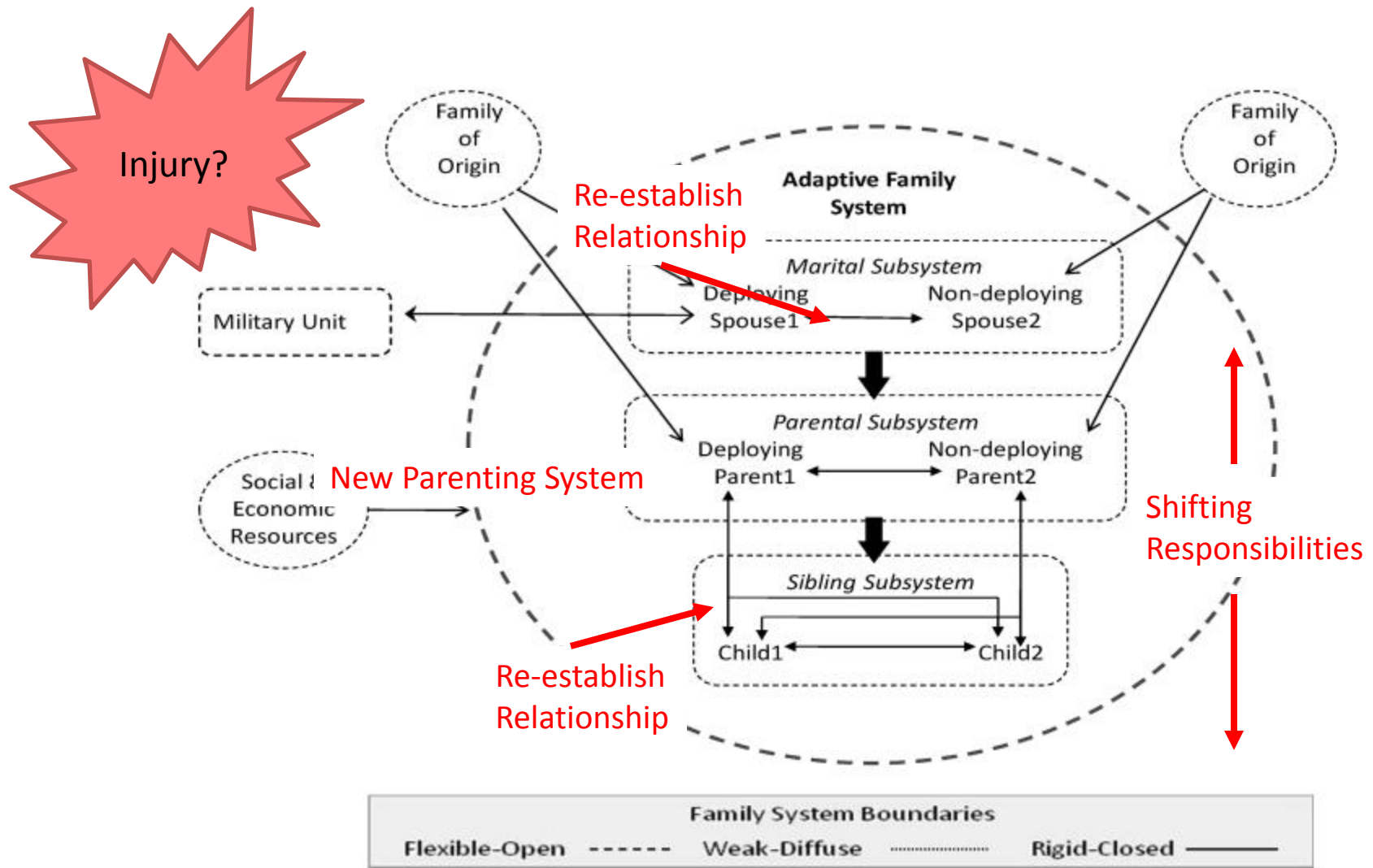
- Prevent or solve problems to base care on what is going well
- Do not assume difficult life events lead to problems for military children
- Acknowledge difficulties yet emphasize positives or opportunities for growth
  - Relocation: New friends, diverse cultures
  - Deployment: Strengthen family relationships



# Military Family Systems: Before Coming Home



# Military Families: Reintegration



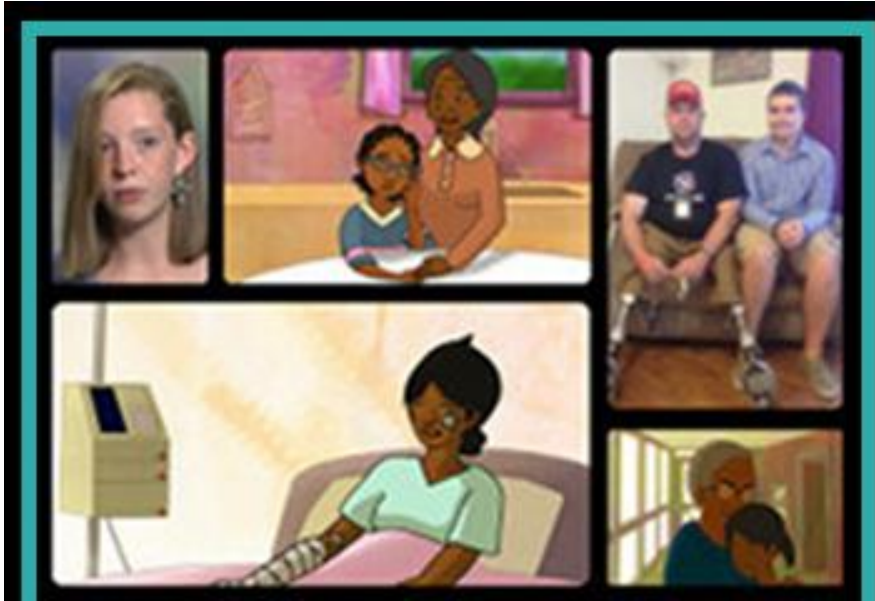
# Reintegration Challenges

- Visible Change
  - Physical Injury
- Invisible – Look the same but act differently
  - Psychological Health (in general)
  - Post-Traumatic Stress
  - Mild Traumatic Brain Injury
- Death (Loss of parent)





# Physical Injury: Child's Experience



- Finding Out
  - Disbelief
  - Will they die?
- Visiting Hospital
- Rehabilitation
- Coming Home
  - Where's home?
  - Being in public

# Post-traumatic Stress: Child's Experience



- Behavioral Observations
  - Before and After
  - Triggers/Hypervigilance
- Figuring It Out
  - Internet
  - Family
- Adjustment
  - Changes in activities they do together

# mTBI: Child's Experience



- Behavioral Observations
  - Before and After
  - Moody
  - Physical limitations
- Figuring It Out
  - Internet
  - Family
- Adjustment
  - Will they get better?
  - Changes in activities they do together

# Death: Child's Experience



- Finding Out
  - “This is actually happening”
  - “He wasn’t supposed to die”
- Coping/Support
  - Rituals
  - Military services
- Remembering
  - “Good time” memories
  - Reminders
- Moving On

# Grief and Loss

## Injury

- Loss as the parent they knew
- Life is different with their parent
- Not the family they were before
- Are they going to be happy again?
- Potential loss of military community

## Death

- Loss of the parent
- Permanency
- Changes in remaining parent
- Loss of military community
- Will “they” be forgotten?



# New Territory

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- Transition from Military Life to Civilian Life
- Women in Combat
- Same-Sex Parents in Military
- Drone-Warfare
- New Conflicts



# Conroy Quote

*The gathering of military men should be thanking their children, their fine and resourceful children, who were strangers in every school they entered, thanking them for their extraordinary service to their country, for the sacrifices they made over and over again . . . Military brats... [spend] their entire youth in service to this country and no one even [knows]. (Conroy, 1991, p. xxv)*







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# Bibliography

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- Military Family Life Project 2010
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- Riggs, S.A. & Riggs, D.S. (2011). Risk and resilience in military families experiencing deployment: The role of the family attachment network. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 25, 675-687.
- Weiss, et al. (2010). The Military Genogram: A Solution-Focused Approach for Resiliency Building In Service Members and Their Families. *The Family Journal*, 18(4), 395-406.



# Thank you, questions?



# Question-and-Answer Session

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- Submit questions via the Adobe Connect or Defense Connect Online question box located on the screen.
- The question box is monitored and questions will be forwarded to our presenter for response.
- We will respond to as many questions as time permits.

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- The Swank HealthCare website will be open through **Thursday, May 2, 2013**, at 11:59 p.m. (EDT)
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May						
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